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AUTHOR	Pascal, Anthony
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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the current state of knowledge on desegregation in the nation's schools. It discusses justifications for and definitions of desegregation. It attempts to answer the following questions: What progress has been attained in the desegregation of schools? What have been the consequences? Which practices have been successful? What questions remain? Specific areas of concern addressed in the answers include: student success in school, racial harmony, desegregation and student withdrawal, staff desegregation and development, school reform, federal assistance, ethnic proportions of students and volunteerism. It is concluded that we are ignorant about the consequences of specific actions used to desegregate schools. More research is suggested. (Author/JP)

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Anthony Pascal

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The Rand Corporation
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WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT SCHOOL DESEGREGATION?

--Anthony Pascal--

Surprisingly, after more than twenty years, we do not really know very much. Research findings on the educational consequences of desegregation are far from conclusive. Studies of race relations in desegregated schools tend toward the contradictory. The magnitude and nature of "white flight" from desegregating school systems has been documented but we know very little about what kinds of desegregation action elicit what sorts of flight behavior. In general, studies have treated school desegregation as an either-or event and have not tried to probe the effects of practical variations from place to place; neither have they had the leisure to examine the longer term consequences. Since desegregation has become the law of the land it behooves us to try to identify those islands of knowledge which do exist in the sea of uncertainty. Doing so can help us in framing effective policies for desegregation which requires in each school system specific decisions on student reassignment, preparation of faculty, reform of the curriculum and a host of other choices.

This article reviews the current state of knowledge on desegregation in the nation's schools. An introductory section discusses justifications for and definitions of desegregation while the succeeding sections seek answers to these questions: What progress has been attained in the desegregation of schools? What have been the consequences? Which practices have been successful? What questions remain?

Although research on school desegregation has a venerable history, available findings are difficult to synthesize. Scientific approaches have varied widely, the measures employed to reflect outcomes have been ambiguous, and the research techniques used verge on the primitive. The result: different conclusions about given consequences of desegregation. And, the consequences of desegregation are multiple so that, for example, a positive change in one objective is often matched by a negative effect in another. Finally, the research has concentrated on

evaluating desegregation as an undifferentiated event. Rarely have analysts asked which individual program features work and which don't. Nonetheless, a systematic review of existing knowledge can provide insights and suggestions useful to policy makers.

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An end to segregated schooling was the aim of the U.S. Supreme Court's Brown decision in 1954. Denying minority children equality of educational opportunity became unconstitutional. "To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in their community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone," wrote Chief Justice Warren. From the beginning, however, the actual educational harm done to segregated minority children has also figured prominently in the reform movement. Thus both moral and educational concerns have been prominent.

Integration promises to advance both sorts of concern. The achievement of desegregation signals, it is alleged, a positive commitment toward the equalization of life chances between the races and will, in the long run, bring about more harmonious relations. Many also argue that predominantly minority schools operate with poorer plants and less qualified teachers, and that they receive less attention from school officials. Others contend that minority students develop stronger achievement orientation when they attend predominantly majority schools where the environment is more conducive to learning.

Definitions of segregation and desegregation have changed substantially over the past 20 years. Early targets for desegregation were Southern districts which ran dual systems for blacks and whites. Subsequently *de jure* segregation in the North, in which school boards took deliberate steps to separate the races, came under attack. More recently, the concept of racial isolation has come into prominence. Schools in which either race predominated --constituted, say, 90 percent-- even when such a proportion resulted only from residential

patterns combined with neighborhood schools, became the targets of court orders or the concern of school boards acting on their own initiative. Now many state and federal courts are ruling against racial imbalance so that no school in a system may depart substantially from the district-wide racial proportions. All these definitions, it should be noted, were typically framed in the context of a single system with a single minority population, usually black.

PROGRESS IN DESEGREGATION

How far has the nation come in eliminating segregation in the public schools? In 1968 the average black child went to a school in which 22 percent of the children were white; in the average white child's school 4 percent were black. (In the nation, in that year, 15 percent of school children were black, and 79 percent were white. The Spanish surnamed constituted 5 percent, Asian and Native Americans less than one percent each.) In any particular school system, these measures of racial contact are affected by local racial composition. Thus, we also need an indicator of the average child's school *segregation* experience, i.e., a measure of how far her/his school deviated from an even distribution of children by race across all schools in the district, ranging from 0 for an even distribution to 1 for complete racial segregation. In 1968 this figure stood at .73. Combining these measures, it appears that in the late sixties racial separation was greatest in: districts in the South (In the North black and white children tended to concentrate in different districts, central city and suburban respectively.); in districts with high proportions of black students, especially big cities; and in elementary schools as compared to secondary.

By the mid-seventies the proportion of white schoolmates for the average American black child had climbed to 34 percent while the proportion of black schoolmates for the average white reached 7 percent and the within-district segregation indicator had dropped to .37. By far, the largest gains in desegregation occurred in the South (where most of the court actions were directed), with moderate gains in the West and virtual standstill in the Northeast. In the South more desegregation

occurred in the high schools, while in the rest of the nation elementary school desegregation tended to lead. And, in general, the smaller the district, and the lower the minority fraction, the more overall desegregation occurred. Although many large cities made desegregation gains, in many others increased racial isolation ensued, mostly because of white residential movement toward nondesegregated neighborhoods or across the line into suburban school systems.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF DESEGREGATION

The desegregation of schools evokes diverse effects. For convenience they may be categorized into consequences for student success (e.g., achievement) and for racial harmony. Also of interest is the relationship between desegregation and the withdrawal of students from public schools.

Success in school. Parents, of whatever race or ethnicity, tend to have similar hopes and desires for the schools. They give prominent rank to the academic progress of their children. Many minority parents expect desegregation to further this end. Has it? In some cases. For example, in Goldsboro, North Carolina, significant gains for black children followed desegregation but in Riverside, California, no such gains for blacks or Chicanos were apparent, even after 10 years. The overall evidence is mixed and somewhat contradictory on the relationship of desegregation to scores on standardized achievement tests, but in general it tends to demonstrate that:

- the gains for minority students are real but modest and contribute little to narrowing the achievement gap between the races
- black girls benefit more than black boys
- minority gains are somewhat more likely to occur in elementary than secondary schools, and in arithmetic as compared to reading
- black children tend to progress more in schools that are predominantly, but not overwhelmingly, white

white students rarely suffer achievement test losses as a result of desegregation

These findings emerge generally from studies in which the socioeconomic status and prior achievement of students are taken into account.

It must be emphasized that in analyzing test scores as well as other aspects of student success, the most important effects may be long term and cumulative; most studies, however, collect outcome data within a very few years after the start of desegregation.

Early proponents of desegregation expected that greater inter-racial contact would affect the personality traits of minority students in such realms as self-esteem, self-confidence, and achievement-orientation, yet no impressive evidence of such effects have emerged, although the fears of some social scientists that desegregation would increase the anxiety felt by children also appears to be unconfirmed. In fact, studies across the country tend to show little initial difference between the races in self-esteem although some indicate a decline in that trait among desegregated black students, particularly girls. Nor are there yet strong grounds to believe that minority students in desegregated schools will be less likely to drop out or more likely to attend college. However, black youth in racially mixed schools often do have "more realistic" (sic) career aspirations.

Racial harmony. Race relations consequences encompass inter-racial attitudes and feelings, cross-race friendship, and the degree of tension between the races in a school. Research findings suggest that desegregation *per se* rarely produces positive change for both races in attitudes and friendships. The positive outcomes which do occur appear to be most frequent in elementary schools and scarcest in junior high schools. For instance, a study of New York City 5th graders found a correlation between racial tolerance and classroom exposure to children of other races; in the same state it was found that both black and white 8th graders in an open enrollment school were more prejudiced than similar students in virtually one-race schools. Black girls are the subgroup least likely to respond positively to desegregation. Middle class and

high achieving students tend to respond more than others. The method by which desegregation was attained--by neighborhood or bussing, voluntary or mandatory--shows no consistent relation with interracial attitudes and friendship.

The evidence on how much interracial tension (e.g., hostility, fights, disorders, separation in extra-curricular activities) desegregation produces is decidedly mixed, although we all have our own favorite anecdotes which range from the malignity of Boston to the benignity of Dallas. Schools with good reputations--attractive plants, successful athletic teams--appear to exhibit lower tension. And so do formerly black schools to which whites are reassigned. The presence of middle class blacks tends to raise tension levels (perhaps because they feel less pressure to maintain subservient social roles than do working class blacks) as does the attendance of lower class whites. A student's perception of acceptance seems highly dependent on whether or not her/his race is in the majority in the desegregated school.

It should be noted that virtually none of the studies of race relations made use of longitudinal designs stretching over substantial time periods. Thus, observed effects are limited to the short run and there are some data indicating that the longer a student's exposure to those of a different race, the better the attitude. Somewhat inconsistently, however, desegregated schools exhibit no reduction in levels of tension over time.

Desegregation and student withdrawal. Attempts to end racial isolation in schools may be thwarted by the behavior of families opposed to desegregation who can relocate in school attendance areas not subject to reassignment actions or who can enroll their children in private schools. Thus, a particular school district may attain desegregation but at the same time lose substantial segments of its middle class, particularly white, student population. There seems little doubt that such has in fact occurred. Gains in within-district school racial balance--whether occasioned by mandatory reassignment or neighborhood racial change--appear to induce white flight which can result when central city families move to the suburbs or when families migrating

to the metropolitan area choose outlying rather than close-in communities. Districts especially susceptible to flight behavior are in big cities, have a substantial minority fraction, and are adjacent to largely white, suburban school districts. Currently, for example, the Washington, D.C., public schools have a student body over 95 percent black; in 1950 the proportion black was 47 percent.

Studies which examine reactions to mandatory desegregation orders conclude that the higher the proportion of total minority and majority children reassigned, the more flight is engendered. Few studies exist which estimate flight responses to bussing *per se*. However, the better studies do attempt--albeit often rather crudely--to isolate the effect of desegregation on flight by taking into account other forces which induce suburbanization of the middle class, such as job movements, housing opportunities, and transportation improvements.

Is white flight a one-shot phenomenon, flushing out those families most resistant to racial reassignment and leaving the more tolerant, or does it continue over the years which follow desegregation? It's hard to tell. Some studies show a continuing desegregation-induced outflow for a number of years; others identify only an immediate post-desegregation loss of whites. But when desegregation induces immediate departure of whites in sizeable numbers, the proportion of the district's population that is black necessarily rises and increases the pulling power of adjacent white districts, all leading to a reinforcement of suburbanization trends. Plans which involve reassignment across existing school district lines--metropolitan solutions--hold down the post-desegregation minority fraction and preclude use of suburban refuges. Courts have been reluctant to impose this solution in the absence of strong evidence of *de jure* segregation across districts, thus limiting the practical application of this remedy to Southern and Border states. In any case, large districts, many of which have one quarter to one half or more minority student populations, could lose a great many of their predesegregation white students in the years following implementation. School systems which have lost as much as 40 percent of the original white student

body since desegregation include Pasadena, Dallas, Oklahoma City, and Chattanooga. On the other hand, Nashville, Roanoke, Springfield, Massachusetts, and Prince Georges County, Maryland, have lost less than 20 percent.

The costs of desegregation. Reassignment plans generate additional budgetary burdens on school systems, mostly for bus purchases, but also often for school plant and equipment improvement and staff training. Surprisingly little is known about costs as a function of type of plan, characteristics of district, and the like. Cost consequences are likely to receive intense attention from taxpayers, however irrelevant they may be to the courts.

FINDING SUCCESSFUL DESEGREGATION PRACTICES

Even though few analysts have devoted themselves explicitly to discovering what works in desegregation, a review of the massive literature on desegregation effects does produce some guidelines for planning. But drawing lessons is complicated by the fact that a given practice may often have a positive effect for one desired outcome (e.g., raising achievement scores) and a negative effect for another (e.g., minimizing school tension or inhibiting white flight).

Leadership and communication. Desegregation depends for its success on adequate preparation of the community, the school staff, and the schools themselves. Communities in which top political and business leaders endorse brotherhood and compliance with the law, where neighborhood groups are invited to contribute ideas on how (not whether) to desegregate, where voluntary prodesegregation actions are encouraged, where parents are welcome to visit the schools to which their children will be reassigned--these places adapt best. Somewhat surprisingly, a lengthy preparation period is a mixed blessing, often allowing vocal opposition groups to coalesce.

Staff desegregation and development. Virtually all observers agree that staff desegregation must accompany the reassignment of students: courts have in fact mandated faculty reassignment. Studies find that same-race teachers enhance the status of minority students and tend to reassure the wary. But mere mixing will not suffice. Existing research finds that teachers and counselors who behave in a racially tolerant manner and who abjure racial stereotypes have a positive effect on both the achievement and the happiness of desegregated minority children. Special in-service training and a supportive principal seem to be the key factors in eliciting such staff behavior.

School reform. The schools themselves require reform as an adjunct to desegregation. Improved educational quality especially in formerly black schools may induce whites to voluntarily transfer to them and should reduce flight among those reassigned. But in all desegregated schools both the curriculum and the extra-curricular activities must evolve appropriately. Materials which reflect the contributions of minorities to American society and which emphasize the special strengths of minority students (e.g., rich vocabularies, artistic talents) have often proven helpful in reducing status discrepancies. Integration in out-of-classroom programs such as sports, student politics, the school play, the school band and clubs should be fostered and since minority students are more likely to excel in these activities, a school environment which rewards success in them should be encouraged.

How to handle tracking--the assignment of students to classrooms on the basis of ability--in desegregated schools is much more controversial. Some argue that it simply defeats the purposes of desegregation, others that the short run effects of tracking will be beneficial because it mitigates academic frustration on the part of minority children and the formation of racial stereotypes by majority children.

Federal Assistance. The government's Equal Educational Opportunity Program has awarded assistance money to desegregating districts on criteria that have little to do with measured needs and progress attained.

Centers set up to provide technical assistance have played a diminishing role in helping draw desegregation plans. Nonprofit organizations which were funded to assist in desegregation have been prohibited from monitoring the implementation of plans. The national clearing house on effective desegregation practices has been phased out. Federal funds could be more effectively targeted toward training of teachers in predominantly white receiving schools and could help districts facing massive bus purchase expenditures. And the money now goes disproportionately to districts already over the desegregation hump rather than those actively desegregating.

In general, many have argued that districts use desegregation assistance funds largely to supplement ordinary expenditures, especially for compensatory education. Little seems to have been done to try to focus funds on making desegregation work. At the least, the concentration of federal monies in desegregating big city districts, which contain the bulk of minority children, would raise the visible concomitants of quality education and thus facilitate peaceful desegregation.

Ethnic proportions. What degree of racial balance should a system aim at when it desegregates its schools? The answer must depend on the district-wide racial proportion, of course, because to allow wide variation among schools, that is to leave some schools virtually uniracial, perpetuates isolation and may cause families to relocate into the attendance areas of the unaffected white schools. About all that can be said is that districts which find themselves with an overall minority proportion between 20 and 30 percent minority are the most fortunate. When a school's minority fraction falls below 20 percent, minority children appear to learn less and to express more dissatisfaction with school. When it exceeds 30 percent, majority children tend to depart. Schools which end up half minority and half majority have the highest levels of tension.

What to do when there is more than one minority group in a district presents even more vexing problems. Many districts with black students also have substantial numbers of Mexican Americans or other Spanish heritage children and some contain Native and Asian Americans. Because

nonblack minorities have less often (than blacks) been victims of *de jure* school segregation, because their residential neighborhoods are more often (than for blacks) the result of self-segregation, and because of bilingual programs in the nonblack minority schools, which require a critical mass, remedies for desegregation of Mexican, Native and Asian American students have been less consistent. Some districts have merely excluded them from the plan, that is they have left such minority schools untouched. Others have lumped all minorities together and attempted to strike a white-anglo/all-minorities-combined balance in each school. Still others have aimed at balancing each ethnic group in each school. Virtually nothing is known concerning the effects of these various remedies on achievement, inter-ethnic relations, or withdrawal.

Affected grade levels. Desegregation planners must decide whether children at all grade levels, or only at some, will be reassigned. In districts which require long distance reassignment, the youngest children (perhaps kindergarten through 2nd grade) have often been excluded. Some systems have excluded high school students on the theory that the costs in ensuing racial tension would be prohibitive. Indeed the quest for positive, desegregation-induced changes in racial attitudes and satisfaction with school appears more promising in the elementary schools. The results for minority children's self-confidence and achievement-orientation are better there too. Whether black high school students or black elementary students are more likely to gain academically from desegregation can still not be demonstrated conclusively. And whether parents tend more frequently to withdraw younger children than teenagers from desegregated schools remains unknown.

Effectuating reassignment. Methods for achieving school desegregation take many forms. In districts free of massive housing segregation, the redrawing of school attendance boundary lines and clustering nearby schools that serve ethnically diverse neighborhoods (often with individual schools offering a shorter grade span) can accomplish much. Large cities with severe residential segregation find that long distance reassignment, which implies bussing, is necessary. One way bussing

(e.g., blacks into white schools) has been attacked as inequitable to minorities and most recent plans have busses traveling in both directions. Equity considerations involve not only the relative number of each race bussed but the proportions, the relative distances involved, the number of years the average minority and majority student is to ride the bus, and relative differences in the qualities of the original and the new school. In some cities conflict arises within a given racial community over whether students from upper income families are treated more favorably.

No systematic evidence is available on the relationship between the distance of the reassigned school from the original school on the one hand and outcomes of interest--achievement, race relations, withdrawal--on the other. But we do know that attempts to minimize bussing can be counter-productive. They result in more reassignment in integrated or racially transitional areas which penalizes the very families which have volunteered for desegregation and hastens white departure from such areas into unaffected portions of the district. And the obverse holds. Not bussing already desegregated children in mixed neighborhoods makes these more attractive places in which to live.

Making the most of volunteerism. In sum, committed community leadership, palpable increases in the quality of the schools and in their sensitivity to pluralism, and adequate support from the federal government will hasten desegregation and increase the likelihood of beneficial effects. But in addition, the more school districts encourage voluntary actions in the direction of integration, the easier and smoother their tasks become. Magnet schools, which can offer educational programs or instructional philosophies unavailable elsewhere have proven capable of attracting majority students to minority neighborhoods. Open enrollment plans, which encourage individual transfers to improve racial balance by providing compensation for student transportation expenses and financial benefits to receiving schools are too seldom investigated. Logically such plans should include all accredited schools, public and private, in the metropolitan area. A bill providing such assistance has recently been introduced in the Congress.

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The paucity of well conducted studies on what works and what doesn't has slowed the pace of school desegregation and has weakened the programs which have been undertaken. This article has demonstrated how ignorant we really are about the consequences of specific actions; it has ignored how little we know about many of the longer run eventualities and more remote relationships. For example, what are the separate influences of inter-ethnic contact and inter-social-class contact on the educational progress of the disadvantaged? Will students with a long history of desegregated schooling be more socially mobile and ethnically tolerant as adults? What are the long run prospects for the desegregated school and what is required to make it a truly integrated, multi-ethnic learning environment? When can we expect residential integration to obviate the need for mandatory reassignment and how can that process be speeded?

Research efforts designed to fill these gaps in knowledge will provide the tools to build the integrated future promised by our best traditions.